

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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R 021747Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8034
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 07588

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR CH VM CB FR
SUBJ: FRENCH VIEW OF INDOCHINA

REF: A. PARIS 04008
B. HONG KONG 2360
C. BUDAPEST 0864
D. PARIS 06925

SUMMARY: A QUAI OFFICER HANDLING INDOCHINESE
AFFAIRS SUMMED UP HIS IMPRESSIONS OF INDOCHINA,
PARTICULARLY VIETNAM, BUILT UP OVER THE PAST
TWO YEARS. HE IS NOT VERY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE
CURRENT POLICY DIRECTION WITHIN VIETNAM, AND
HE FORESEES VERY LITTLE ADVANCE IN FRANCO/
VIETNAMESE RELATIONS IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE.
HE THINKS FRANCE WILL PERSIST IN EFFORTS TO
KEEP RELATIONS AS GOOD AS THEY CAN BE. SOURCE
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THOUGHT THAT THE USSR WAS PROBABLY BEHIND SOME
OF THE FRICTIONS BETWEEN THE GOF AND SRV AND
CONSIDERED HANOI WAS SHOWING ITSELF TO BE
INCREASINGLY RESPONSIVE TO MOSCOW. FRENCH
HAVE CONSULAR, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS
WITH THE SRV, AND ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY
CONCERNED ABOUT VIETNAMESE INTENTIONS TOWARD

CAMBODIA AND WHAT THEY CONSIDER A LACK OF WILL
IN HANOI TO MINIMIZE FRICTIONS WITH PEKING.
THE SOURCE'S VIEWS ON DEPARTING HIS POST REFLECT MUCH
LESS OPTIMISM THAN HE BROUGHT TO HIS POSITION. HIS
SUCCESSOR IS AN OLD ASIAN HAND WHO WILL BE WELL
WORTH CULTIVATING BY THE US. END SUMMARY.

1. DOLDRUMS IN FRANCO/VIETNAMESE RELATIONS.
ON HIS LAST DAY ON THE JOB, THE QUAI DEPUTY DIRECTOR
HANDLING INDOCHINA GAVE EMBOFF A SUMMING UP OF
THE INDOCHINA (PARTICULARLY VIETNAMESE) SITUATION
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE NEARLY TWO YEARS
HE HAD STUDIED THE AREA. THE FRENCH CONSIDERED THAT
THERE WAS NOT NOW VERY MUCH FORWARD MOVEMENT IN
FRANCO/VIETNAMESE RELATIONS. THE EARLIER
ENTHUSIASM IN PARIS AND HANOI AT THE TIME OF
PHAM VAN DONG'S APRIL VISIT TO PARIS HAS GIVEN WAY
TO MORE SOBER ATTITUDE ON BOTH SIDES. SOURCE
REMARKED PHILOSOPHICALLY THAT FRANCE HAS BEEN
MAKING A VERY CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO IMPROVE RELATIONS
WITH VIETNAM SINCE 1961, AND THIS LONG TERM POLICY
WILL NOT BE BASICALLY AFFECTED BY THE CURRENT
RELATIVE LACK OF ELAN. FRANCE WILL "LEAVE THE
DOOR OPEN" FOR WHENEVER THE VIETNAMESE ARE READY
TO MOVE FORWARD. FRANCE CONSIDERS THAT VIETNAM
IS A BIG COUNTRY IN THE AREA AND ONE WITH SPECIAL
AFFINITIES AND TIES WITH FRANCE. OVER THE LONG RUN THE
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SOURCE THOUGHT THESE PERMANENT FAVORABLE
FACTORS WOULD BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE CURRENT
PROBLEMS. EVEN IN THE FIELD OF CULTURE FRANCE HOPED
TO HAVE EXCHANGED WITH SRV, AS WITH EASTERN EUROPE,
WHICH WOULD FURTHER DETENTE.

2. THE FRENCH WERE SOMEWHAT CONFUSED AS TO WHY
THEY WERE HAVING SUCH PROBLEMS WITH VIETNAM ON
SO MANY FRONTS WHEN THE DONG VISIT SEEMED TO
PROMISE A BETTER CLIMATE. THEY THOUGHT THAT SOVIET
INFLUENCE MIGHT BE ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL FACTORS. THEY

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USDOCOSOUTH FOR

HAD NOTED THAT AFTER HIS VISIT TO PARIS, DONG
VISITED MOSCOW AND THEN THERE WERE VISITS BY
GIAP AND OTHER HIGH VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS. IT WAS
ALSO SIGNIFICANT, SOURCE THOUGHT, THAT THE
VIETNAMESE ATTENDED FOR THE FIRST TIME AN
IDEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY MOSCOW IN
BUDAPEST (REF C). WHILE HANOI HAD EARLIER
EMPHASIZED ITS ROLE IN THE NON-ALIGNED
MOVEMENT (SOMEWHAT DOWNPLAYING ITS "SOCIALIST"
ROLE), MORE RECENTLY HANOI APPEARED TO BE MORE
BLATANTLY CLOSE TO MOSCOW. AS THE FRENCH HAD
NOTED PREVIOUSLY IN THE CASE OF LAOS, MOSCOW
SEEMED TO PREFER TO ADVISE VIETNAM TO BE LESS
WARM WITH FRANCE. SOURCE ASKED WHETHER WE HAD
HEARD THE RUMOR THAT BREZHNEV WOULD VISIT HANOI.

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3. THE FRENCH CURRENTLY HAVE PROBLEMS WITH THE
VIETNAMESE IN THE CONSULAR, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL
FIELDS. WHILE CONSULAR RELATIONS IN HANOI HAVE
PROCEEDED NORMALLY, THE FRENCH WERE HAVING
INCREASING DIFFICULTIES IN SAIGON. (THE
IMPLICATION WAS THAT THE VIETNAMESE WERE TRYING
TO LIMIT THE FRENCH ACTIVITIES THERE, AND PERHAPS
TO REDUCE STAFF). THE VIETNAMESE WERE CAUSING

TROUBLE ABOUT DUAL NATIONALS AND OTHER PERSONS
WHOM THE FRENCH HAD PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT THEY WOULD
BE ABLE TO GET OUT OF SOUTH VIETNAM. (SEE ALSO
REF D PARA 3.)

4. ECONOMIC RELATIONS.

ALTHOUGH THE FRENCH AID OFFERED IN THE PAST
FEW YEARS HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE, THE SRV HAS
SHOWN NO GREAT HASTE IN TRYING TO TAKE THE AID.
THE TWO PRINCIPAL BUSINESS ENTERPRISES DISCUSSING
DEALS WITH VIETNAM WERE CREUSOT-LOIRE
(STEEL PLANT) AN ELF AQUITAINE (PETROLEUM
EXPLORATION). THE VIETNAMESE WERE CURRENTLY DOING
VERY LITTLE ON THE STEEL PLANT, AND CREUSOT-LOIRE
WAS JUST AS HAPPY TO HAVE ITS RESOURCES FREED FOR
ACTIVITIES ELSEWHERE, AND, AS FOR THE GOF, IT WAS
NOT DISTRESSED THAT IT WAS NOT PUTTING OUT AID
FUNDS. IN THE PETROLEUM FIELD, THE VIETNAMESE WERE
NOT OFFERING TERMS WHICH WERE ACCEPTABLE TO ELF.
THEY OCCASIONALLY ARGUED THAT THE ITALIANS AND
GERMANS WERE OFFERING BETTER TERMS, BUT ELF
CONSIDERED THAT THE ITALIANS AND GERMANS WOULD NOT
BE ABLE TO PROVIDE THE SAME EXPERTISE ELF WAS
OFFERING. IN ANY CASE, ELF ALSO WAS JUST AS
PLEASED TO BE USING ITS RESOURCES ELSEWHERE.
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THE SOURCE NOTED THAT IN THE THREE YEARS SINCE THE
DE FACTO UNIFICATION OF VIETNAM; NOT ONE OIL WELL
HAD BEEN SUNK. HE WONDERED WHETHER, DESPITE ALL
THE PUBLICITY AND DISCUSSIONS WITH OIL COMPANIES,
THE SRV WAS REALLY GREATLY INTERESTED IN
EXPLOITING ITS PETROLEUM. (A VIETNAMESE OFFICIAL
HAD PREVIOUSLY COMMENTED THAT THE SRV CONSIDERED
THAT OTHERS, PARTICULARLY THE ITALIANS
AND GERMANS WERE PREPARED TO GIVE BETTER TERMS
THAN THE FRENCH AND ALSO THAT THE SMALLER
PETROLEUM COMPANIES WERE EASIER TO DEAL WITH
THAN THE 'MAJORS'.)

5. POLITICAL RELATIONS.

THE FRENCH HAD TOLD THE VIETNAMESE THAT FOREIGN
MINISTER GUIRINGAUD HAD TO CANCEL HIS VISIT TO
HANOI AFTER PEKING BECAUSE OF HIS SCHEDULE. HOWEVER,
IT WAS CLEAR EVEN TO HANOI THAT IT WAS REALLY
BECAUSE OF THE STATUS OF FRANCO/VIETNAMESE RELATIONS
PARTICULARLY IN THE LIGHT OF THE CURRENT FIGHTING
ALONG THE CAMBODIAN BORDER. WHILE THE FRENCH

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DID NOT KNOW WHICH PARTY WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR STARTING
THE CLASHES, THEY HAD COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT
HANOI WAS EMBARKING ON AN "ADVENTUROUS" POLICY IN
INDOCHINA, ONE WITH WHICH FRANCE COULD NOT
ASSOCIATE ITSELF. SOURCE THOUGHT THAT THE VIETNAMESE
WERE AWARE THAT THE FRENCH WERE INCREASINGLY CRITICAL
OF THE DIRECTION OF MANY SRV POLICIES. THE GOF
THOUGHT IT WAS NATURAL TO PUT SOME OF THE OFFICIALS
OF THE FORMER SVN GOVERNMENT INTO "REEDUCATION",
BUT THERE HAS SURELY BEEN TIME TO SCREEN THEM ALL
AND TO RELEASE MOST OF THEM. IN ADDITION, PREVENTING
ANYONE ASSOCIATED WITH THE PREVIOUS REGIME FROM
PRACTICING HIS PROFESSION WHEN TRAINED CADRE WERE
IN SUCH SHORT SUPPLY SEEMED UNDLY VINDICTIVE AS
WELL AS WASTEFUL. THE FRENCH ALSO THOUGHT
THAT THE ECONOMIC PROGRAM WHICH HANOI WAS
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DEVisING FOR AGRICULTURE IN THE SOUTH WAS ALSO ILL ADVISED AND IT WOULD RESULT IN A DECREASE IN PRODUCTION, WHICH WOULD THEN NECESSITATE FURTHER HANOI BEGGING FOR GRAIN. THE FRENCH HAD NOTED A GREAT DROP IN THE ENTHUSIASM AND MORALE OF THE VIETNAMESE WORKERS IN THE NORTH AS WELL AS SOUTH AND THERE WAS DEFINITELY A DROP IN PRODUCTIVITY. THIS POPULAR RESPONSE WAS A FURTHER INDICATION THAT THE POLICIES ADOPTED WERE NOT IN TUNE WITH THE PEOPLE'S NEEDS AND DESIRES. WHILE THE FRENCH ACCEPT THAT THE SRV HAS THE RIGHT TO DECIDE ON ITS INTERNAL POLICIES, THE FRENCH ALSO HAVE THEIR OPINIONS, AND THE VIETNAMESE ARE PROBABLY NOT PLEASED BY THE NEGATIVE FRENCH VIEWS.

6. AS FOR THE CONFLICT WITH CAMBODIA, FRANCE HAD REFRAINED FROM TAKING SIDES, BUT THEY WERE INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT JUST HOW FAR HANOI WOULD PRESS ITS ADVANTAGE. IN THE WAR OF ATTRITION, WHICH HANOI WAS APPARENTLY WAGING (EVEN IF IT DID NOT MAKE GREAT TERRITORIAL INROADS) IT CLEARLY WISHED TO KEEP GRINDING UP THE KHMER MILITARY CADRE AND WAR MATERIAL AS THOUGH TO CREATE A VACUUM INTO WHICH SOMETHING MORE FAVORABLE TO HANOI COULD MOVE. THE FRENCH WERE STARTLED BY WHAT KAPITSA HAD SAID RECENTLY, FIRST TO THE FRENCH AND THEN TO THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR: THE VIETNAMESE WERE DEFINITELY ON KHMER TERRITORY, IN SOME PLACES THEY WERE DEEP INTO KHMER TERRITORY, THEY WOULD STAY THERE, AND IF THIS RESULTED IN THE FALL OF THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT OF PHNOM PENH THEN SO MUCH THE BETTER FOR EVERYONE. THE FRENCH THOUGHT IT STRANGE THAT KAPITSA SHOULD BE SO UNCUSTOMARILY BLUNT AND CONCLUDED THAT PERHAPS THE SOVIETS WISHED THEM TO REPEAT THIS

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LINE TO THE CHINESE TO LET THEM KNOW THAT THE USSR IS GIVING VIETNAM FULL SUPPORT AND THAT THE CHINESE WERE POWERLESS TO STOP WHAT THE VIETNAMESE HAD EMBARKED ON.

7. KAMPUCHEA. AS FOR THE KHMER GOVERNMENT, THE FRENCH COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY THE KHMER WERE FALLING INTO THE TRAP OF CONTINUALLY SENDING THEIR FORCES AGAINST THE VIETNAMESE; EVEN IF LOSSES WERE EQUAL, THE KHMER COULD ONLY LOSE BECAUSE OF THE DISPARITY IN STRENGTH BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THE FRENCH REMAINED CONVINCED THAT THE CHINESE WISHED SIHANOUK TO RETURN TO POWER; ADDED TO THE IMPRESSION LEFT BY TENG HSIAO-P'ING IN HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH BARRE (REF A) WERE THE

CHINESE REPLAYS OF MANY WESTERN NEWS STORIES ABOUT SIHANOUK, THE MOST RECENT FROM AUSTRALIA. THE CHINESE WERE CLEARLY GETTING NOWHERE WITH POL POT AND COMPANY IN REINSTALLING SIHANOUK OR IN CHANGING KHMER POLICIES OF WHICH THEY DISAPPROVED. AFTER ALL, SARY HAD TOLD THE DANISH AMBASSADOR THAT SIHANOUK WAS AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE, AND IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO REVERSE SUCH A LINE.

8. INDOCHINESE IN FRANCE. SOURCE SAID THAT AN INCREASING NUMBER OF KHMER EXILES IN FRANCE WERE SAYING THAT IF THERE WERE A MORE MODERATE GOVERNMENT IN PHNOM PENH, WHICH FAVORED COOPERATION WITH HANOI, IT WOULD PROBABLY BE A GOOD THING FOR THE KHMER PEOPLE.

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THE FRENCH THOUGHT THAT THESE KHMER WERE BEING BOUGHT BY THE VIETNAMESE, AND IT COULD INDICATE MORE INTENSIVE EFFORTS ELSEWHERE TO BUILD UP A GROUP OF KHMER WHO COULD BE INSERTED INTO KAMPUCHEA BY THE SRV WHEN THE CURRENT REGIME FALLS THROUGH THE

GRINDING UP OF ITS LIMITED CADRE.

9. SINO/VIETNAMESE RELATIONS. THE FRENCH THINK THAT SINO/VIETNAMESE RELATIONS HAVE DETERIORATED FURTHER RECENTLY, THEY THINK THE CHANCES OF SOMETHING VERY DRASTIC HAPPENING ARE MUCH GREATER THAN APPARENTLY WASHINGTON THINKS (HOLBROOKE/LABOULAYE CONVERSATION). WHILE THE FRENCH RECOGNIZE THAT BOTH THE CHINESE AND VIETNAMESE HAVE A FEW THOUSAND YEARS OF DEALING WITH EACH OTHER AND CAN PROBABLY STOP SHORT OF ACTIONS WHICH WOULD REALLY PROVOKE THE OTHER, ONE SHOULD NOT NEGLECT, CONFIDENTIAL

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THE SOURCE THOUGHT, THE POSSIBILITY OF A MISTAKE IN JUDGMENT. IF VIETNAM MORE CLEARLY ESPOUSES THE SOVIET LINE AT THE IDEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE AND AFTERWARDS, CHINA WILL BE FURTHER ALIENATED AND ANTAGONIZED. THE FRENCH FOUND THE VIETNAMESE VERY COCKY, VERY SURE OF THEMSELVES IN THE ATTACK ON CAMBODIA AND SHOWED NO REAL WILL TO GET ALONG WITH PEKING ON THIS SCORE (REF B). IN PART THE SRV CONFIDENCE APPEARED BASED ON THE KIND OF ASSURANCES FROM THE SOVIETS WHICH WOULD BE ANATHEMA TO THE CHINESE. EVEN IF THE VIETNAMESE REFRAIN FROM MARCHING TO PHNOM PENH AND TAKING OVER KAMPUCHEA MILITARILY (FOR FEAR OF POLITICAL PROBLEMS WITH THAILAND AND CHINA) ANY INCREASE IN VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE IN KAMPUCHEA, PARTICULARLY IF IT MEANS A PRO-HANOI COMMUNIST PARTY, WILL CAUSE CHINA TO LOSE FACE. WHILE NOT PREDICTING OPEN CONFLICT BETWEEN CHINA AND VIETNAM, FRANCE THINKS THE ELEMENTS FOR A DANGEROUS SITUATION ARE THERE.

10. VIETNAMESE INTERNAL POLITICS. THE SOURCE SAID THAT LIKE HIS PREDECESSORS HE HAS BEEN TRYING TO PENETRATE THE MYSTERIES OF THE OPERATION OF THE VIETNAMESE PARTY AND GOVERNMENT. THE FRENCH CONTINUE TO FIND IT NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO COME TO ANY CLEAR OPINION ON THE WORKING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE. IT IS CLEAR THAT LE DUAN IS MORE THAN A PRIMUS INTER PARES, BUT IT IS STILL CERTAINLY NOT A ONE MAN SHOW. THE FRENCH HAD BEEN GREATLY INTERESTED IN SOME RECENT PRONOUNCEMENTS BY LE DUC THO; THEY SOUNDED DIFFERENT FROM PRONOUNCEMENTS OF OTHERS IN THE SRV LEADERSHIP AND APPEARED TO CONFIRM THE IMPRESSION CREATED BY HIS PROMOTION IN THE HIERARCHY THAT HE WAS AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT LEADER PARTICULARLY FOR SOME KEY CONFIDENTIAL

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PROBLEMS. BEYOND THIS, THE FRENCH COULD ONLY GUESS AT RELATIONSHIPS AND POWER CONFLICTS. IN GENERAL, THE FRENCH FELT THERE WERE DISPUTES WHICH BLOCKED MANY ACTIONS CLEARLY ADVISABLE (PARTICULARLY IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD) AND, AS HE NOTED ABOVE, SOME DECISIONS IN THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FIELD WHICH THE FRENCH THOUGHT REFLECTED ERRONEOUS IDEOLOGICAL DECISIONS RATHER THAN A SENSIBLE APPROACH TO VIETNAM'S REAL PROBLEMS. THE FRENCH THOUGHT THAT THE VIETNAMESE WOULD PROFIT FROM STUDYING THE MORE SENSIBLE POLICIES ASSOCIATED WITH TENG HSIAO-PING IN CHINA.

11. COMMENT: THE SOURCE IS NOT AN OLD ASIAN HAND, BUT HE HAS COME A LONG WAY IN THE PAST TWO YEARS FROM OPTIMISM ABOUT VIETNAM'S DEVELOPMENTS AND THE FUTURE OF FRANCO/VIETNAMESE RELATIONS TO A RATHER MORE SOMBER VIEW. HIS SUCCESSOR HAS THE EXPERIENCE OF WORKING FOR YEARS WITH THE CHINESE AND VIETNAMESE; HE SHOULD SOON READ HIMSELF IN ON INDOCHINESE PROBLEMS AND BE USEFUL SOURCE FOR THE U.S.
HARTMAN

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